

Gulliver as Orator:



An Examination of Rhetoric
as Theme and Process

In Jonathan Swift's
Gulliver's Travels

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In an article entitled "Swift's Rhetoric: the 'Overfraught Pinnacle?'" Miriam Starkman warns against the danger of confusing satire as mode with satire as genre in the works of Swift. *Gulliver's Travels*, she insists is a "true prose satire" like *A Tale of a Tub*. Thus she goes on to suggest that those who see in Gulliver a character, comic, tragic, or otherwise, are just mistaken as those who find models for good rhetoric in the encomiastic parodies of *A Tale of a Tub*.¹ To recognize the relationship between the term "character" and the Gulliver-persona has remained a problem in Swift criticism. Raymond Smith does view Lemuel Gulliver as a "character," with emphasis on the quotation marks. Gulliver, he argues, lacks the individuation and self-realization of an Elizabeth Bennet; instead, the Gulliver-ethos functions more in accordance with a "character" in the sense of a given personification of the *ingénue* which, in this case, bears "the burden of the satire."² W. B. Ewald sees Gulliver as significantly more complex, suggesting that Swift uses Gulliver for different purposes at it happens to suit his satiric needs in a particular context.³ Perhaps the most intuitive handling of the Gulliver problem is a discussion by C. J. Rawson, in "Gulliver and the 'Gentle Reader'" where he suggests that Gulliver often exceeds our expectations as a satiric mask by establishing an "intimacy" with the reader in which he occasionally appears to anticipate our objections as part of his own self-defense.⁴

On one level the many instances in which the persona "steps through" the narrative to lay his candor and good judgment before the reader, are a function of the so-called "travel book" element. As critics have shown, the author's claims for his own veracity are traditional in travel literature, from Dampier, by whom Gulliver purports to have been influenced himself, all the way back to Lucian.⁵ Yet

¹ Miriam K. Starkman, "Swift's Rhetoric: the 'Overfraught Pinnacle?'" *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 68 (1969), 188-97.

² Raymond J. Smith, Jr., "The 'Character' of Lemuel Gulliver," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 10 (1965), 133-40.

³ W. B. Ewald, *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954) 131.

⁴ C. J. Rawson *Gulliver and the "Gentle Reader": Studies in Swift in Our Time* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 57.

we must also agree with Rawson that claims to veracity and factuality are so “insistent in *Gulliver’s Travels*, that by the time he gets to book IV, Gulliver is actually conducting a quarrel with the reader.”⁶

To approach *Gulliver’s Travels* from the vantage point of the persona’s contrivance in the narrative suggests another interesting correlation as well. In view of Gulliver’s relative success in approximating himself to the societies he visits, and in view, also, of the education that Swift stipulates as part of Gulliver’s background in Chapter One of the first voyage—namely his three years at Emmanuel College, Cambridge—it is helpful to look more closely at Gulliver’s role as a rhetorician in each of the four voyages.

* * *

One need not read very far in the work before seeing Gulliver employ rhetoric in its most elaborate and challenging embodiment, the public oration. It is helpful, in this connection, to trace the events that precede Gulliver’s first address to the Lilliputians. Gulliver wakes up in Lilliput, then, to observe an aggregation of diminutive creatures about his body. Among the first impressions he records is the fact that,

one of them, who ventured so far as to get a full Sight of my Face, lifting up his Hands and Eyes by way of admiration, cried out in a shrill, but distinct Voice, *Hekinah Degul*: The others repeated the same Words several times, but I then knew not what they meant.⁷

Despite the obvious inconvenience of the language barrier, there are several aspects of the Lilliputians’ conduct here that could not have been lost on a man of Gulliver’s background and temperament. In terms of gesture and voice quality, both important facets of delivery, the brave

⁵ Ewald, 127, and Walter Eddy, *Gulliver’s Travels: A Critical Study* (New York: Russell and Russell,) 32.

⁶ Rawson, 62.

⁷ *Jonathan Swift, Gulliver’s Travels*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965). All future citations are to this edition.

ambassador who first approaches the man-mountain executes his address in strict accordance with the tenets of classical rhetoric. In particular, he carries out his effort to win Gulliver's attention by employing his hands and eyes in a single emphatic movement and using a voice quality that is "distinct" but not thunderous. According to the *Ad Herennium* such features characterize the "Hortatory Tone of Amplification,"⁸ a rhetorical category which would easily be suitable for the confrontation between Lilliputian orators and their prisoner. At the same time, successive repetition of the words, *Hekinah Degul* do not lose their effect on Gulliver, despite his inability to comprehend them. Thus he stipulates several minutes later that a particular "person of Quality" among the Lilliputians, prefaced his long oration by crying out three times, *Langro Dekul san* (23). Gulliver can infer from these first observations not only the emphatic decorum of the Lilliputians, but also, through their use of a figure of repetition (epizeuxis),⁹ the ardor with which they are devoted to their cause, though yet unknown to Gulliver.

Gulliver's interest in the rhetorical prowess of the Lilliputians at this critical juncture in his experience with them is likewise confirmed when he prepares to tell us of the Emperor's address. He stipulates that, after having his own head unbound, he had "the liberty of . . . observing the Person and Gestures of him who was to speak" (23). He then proceeds to describe the emperor according to the principles of an epideictic statement or address, focusing specifically on the topics of age and physical attributes.¹⁰ The emperor, we are told, "appeared to be of middle Age, and taller than any of the other three who attended him." Gulliver then adds in the same breath the ironic detail that he is "somewhat longer than my middle Finger" (23). Subsequently, though, the fact that the emperor "acted every part of an Orator" in whom Gulliver observes "many Periods of Threatenings and others of Promises, Pity and Kindness (23) becomes specially important. Whether the figure of the emperor

⁸ Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, trans. H. Caplan, Loeb Classical Library, ed. E. H. Warmington. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 197-99.

⁹ *epizeuxis* is the successive repetition of a word or words. Cf. Sr. Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947), 307.

¹⁰ *Ad Herennium*, 173

inspires in Gulliver an unshakable admiration at this point, or whether—and this is more likely—the traveler is motivated by a desire to show that he is equal, on the grounds of his own classical training, to the best of the Lilliputians, he now responds to the emperor in a way that is both graphic and entirely

suitable to his situation. Relying on gestures, voice tone, and countenance associated in the *Ad Herennium* with the “Pathetic Tone of Amplification,”¹¹ Gulliver answers “in a few Words, but in the most submissive Manner, lifting up my left Hand and both mine Eyes to the Sun, as calling him for a Witness” (23). And while Gulliver proceeds to demonstrate his virtuosity in this kind, Swift manages to satirize his performance without, however, “dissolving” it in ridicule or precluding its further application. Having referred to the sun for validation, Gulliver descends, in the very same sentence, to a more mundane matter that nevertheless begs for consideration. Since he lacks the convenience of speaking or understanding Lilliputian at this point, he uses gestures to convey his predicament:

and being almost famished with Hunger, having not eaten a Morsel for some Hours before I left the Ship, I found the demands of Nature so strong upon me that I could not forbear showing my impatience (perhaps against the Rules of Decency) by putting my Finger frequently on my Mouth, to signify that I wanted Food. (23)

We cannot exaggerate the irony of this whole scene if we try to visualize the abrupt succession of such incongruous gestures, first lifting hands toward the sun and then pointing to his mouth, a juxtaposition which is indeed “against the Rule of Decency.” When we recall Gulliver’s size in relation to his audience, of course, the scene becomes twice as ludicrous. Yet, for all that, Gulliver does obtain his immediate object in the form of generous sustenance from his listeners.

The orations for this momentous occasion of the encounter of Gulliver with the Lilliputians are still not over, though. Having obtained a condition of relative satiety and comfort, our author observes the preparatory movements of a “Person of high Rank” (24) who plans to address him. This notable also

¹¹ *Ad Herennium*, 203-205.

observes the epideictic format: he produces his own “Credentials under the Signet Royal which he applied close to mine Eyes” (25). Again, Gulliver seems to be impressed with this conduct because he mentions particular details both for his own instruction as well as the reader’s: that the orator spoke “about ten minutes, without any Signs of Anger, but with a kind of determinate Resolution; often pointing forwards which, as I afterwards found, was toward the Capitol City” (25).

These opening confrontations conclude by showing Gulliver to be both rhetorically as well as physically overpowered by the Lilliputians, a situation whose irony cannot fail to escape us. When the “Person of high Rank,” just mentioned, adumbrates the nation’s designs for transporting Gulliver, the latter resorts again to his own rhetorical strategies, though this time without as much success:

I answered in a few Words, but to no purpose, and made a Sign with my Hand that was loose, putting it to the other (but over his Excellency’s Head for fear of hurting him and his train) and then to my own Head and Body, to signify that I desired my Liberty (25)

Though “his Excellency” will not grant the author’s wishes in this case, he does concede by means of virtuous “signs” a promise for “Meat and Drink enough, and very good Treatment” (25). Gulliver at this point is resigned and informs his reading audience simply that he “gave Tokens” of submission. Yet even now he does not lose sight of rhetoric and decorum because, though his own contest with the Lilliputians is temporarily resolved, he is comforted to notice the “cheerful Countenances” (25) of the withdrawing *Hurgo* and his train as well as the character of the “general Shout” involving “frequent Repetitions of the Words, *Peplom Selan* (25). Throughout his elaborate opening scene, then, Gulliver Indicates by his descriptions as well as his own rejoinders to the Lilliputians, that he is as pleased with the conduct of this diminutive creatures as if he were Cicero himself—despite the fact that he comprehends not one syllable of what they have uttered.

One critic has maintained that the primary object of ridicule in the persona’s first exchanges

with the inhabitants of Voyage 1 is the Lilliputian orators themselves rather than Gulliver.¹² Perhaps it is equally viable to suggest that Swift exempts neither from his aim. In any case, a closer examination of Book I as well as the other three voyages will reveal that the rhetorical strategizing and posturing illustrated in this opening scene of the *Travels* is highly characteristic of Gulliver and is integral to his significance in the work.

Gulliver's own awareness of the impact of physiognomy for purposes of persuasion motivates his second and more elaborate description of the emperor in Chapter II. There he tabulates in greater detail the monarch's "physical attributes" as in the epideictic format:¹³ "his Austrian Lip, and arched Nose, his Complexion olive, his Countenance erect, his Body and Limbs well proportioned" (30). The author is also at pains to suggest the characteristic figure presented by that Sovereign and describes as well "all his Motions graceful, and his Department majestick" (30). He continues in the same vein, devoting meticulous attention to the emperor's clothes and accessories, while emphasizing at one point, that "His voice was shrill, but very clear and articulate" (31). One detail that Gulliver mentions as he concludes his elaborate "prosopopeia" of the emperor is that the latter stood, during his perusal, with "his Sword drawn from his Hand, to defend himself, if I should happen to break loose" (30-31).

Shortly afterwards, in a more playful situation, Gulliver uses his mastery of facial expression, not to persuade but to frighten the poor wretch who had shot arrows at him in his house: "I made a Countenance as if I would eat him alive," Gulliver confesses, and then assures the reader that "The poor Man squalled terribly" (31). Having affirmed his power of the poor creature, however, he then displays a truly heroic ethos and grants pardon.

Aside from these revealing incidents, Gulliver makes it clear that his rhetorical function in Lilliput shall be, from first to last, to promote the cause of his own emancipation. Thus it is solely self-

¹² John Bullitt, *Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire: A Study of Satiric Technique*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 193), 178-9.

¹³ *Ad Herennium*, 181ff.

interest that governs his efforts to learn the Lilliputian tongue. Having been provided with teachers from the emperor himself, Gulliver states that, “the first Words I learnt, were to express my Desire, that he would please to give me my Liberty, which I every day repeated on my Knees” (33). Accurately suiting his gesture to his words in accordance with advice from Cicero and others, Gulliver thus humbles himself before the emperor.¹⁴ The latter is not easily convinced by Gulliver’s prowess, and answers with an artful formula of his own: “His answer, as I cold apprehend, was that this must be a Work of Time” (33).

The emperor also uses this occasion to inform Gulliver of his more immediate Fortune:

He desired that I would not take it ill, if he gave Orders to certain proper Officers to search me; for probably I might carry about me several Weapons, which must needs be dangerous Things, if they answered the Bulk of so prodigious a Person (33).

Gulliver, of course, assents and commits himself wholly to their designs, a response which is not unexpected in view of the emperor’s rhetorical strategy. The emperor, more particularly, avails himself of two devices traditionally used by orators when addressing audiences not favorably disposed towards them or their cause: with the figure of “Parrhesia” he attempts to secure Gulliver’s pardon before the intrusive act of searching his pockets and, secondly, he justifies the measure by offering a reason with figure of “Dicaelogia,” sometimes called “Excusatio.”¹⁵ Aside from the obvious irony of the situation—that the obtaining of Gulliver’s consent for this purpose is not simply a matter of decorum but rather a physical necessity—it is clear that Swift’s satire does not begin and end in the emperor alone. The fact that Gulliver is won over by these devices becomes significant because, within the framework of his own prose style in the *Travels*, the Gulliver-author uses these and other figures of the same category to manipulate *his* readers.

One of many such examples occurs in Gulliver’s treatment of the dilemma that arose in

¹⁴ *Ad Herennium*, 201 205.

¹⁵ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577). 115.

connection with his bodily functions. First of all, Gulliver, like the emperor, makes frequent use of antonomasia, the substitution of an “adventitious epithet”¹⁶ for the actual name of something. Thus Gulliver refers to the “Necessities of Nature” and “so uncleanly an Action,” (29) not so much to spare

the sensibility of his readers as to convince us of his own scruples in the matter. Likewise he concludes the paragraph with an emphatic “Excusatio” or justification for having “dwelt so long upon a Circumstance, that perhaps at first Sight may not appear very momentous” (29). We notice, first of all, that Gulliver does not apologize for introducing the subject but merely for having afforded it so much space: thus he exploits the expectations of the reader who is prepared to forgive him.

At the same time, Gulliver appears to anticipate some censure from his audience when he proclaims that he “thought it necessary to justify my Character in Point of Cleanliness to the World; which I am told some of my Maligners have been pleased, upon this and other Occasions, to call in Question” (29). One cannot help but agree with Rawson that, here and elsewhere, Gulliver is talking not so much to a reading audience as to an opponent.¹⁷

Another prominent example of Gulliver’s rhetorical agility in Book I is found in his description of the great fire in Chapter V. After describing his monstrous *faux pas* on this occasion (urinating on the empress’ apartments to order to quell the fire), Gulliver, instead of attempting to provide viable reasons for his action, is even more subtle in employing the strategy of artful diversion or “apoplanesis.”¹⁸ Having mentioned the particulars of the incident, he concludes Chapter VI with a brief account of the empress’ wrath—she “could not forbear vowing Revenge,” (56) he explains. Rather than speculate on the implications of this dilemma, however, Gulliver fortuitously turns in Chapter VI to a description of the empire. He is “content,” he announces, “to gratify the curious Reader with some general” impressions of the nation, though he intends to leave a fuller account of it to a future

¹⁶ Ad Herrenium, 335.

¹⁷ Rawson, 62.

¹⁸ The figure of digression is used when our “cause” is weak. Peacham, 117.

publication (57). Thus, by proceeding to dwell on such matters as “the common Size of the Natives . . . as well as Plants and Trees,” (57) the Gulliver-author distracts his audience from the very ignoble figure he has made in the previous paragraph.

The habit Gulliver displays here of postponing further development of a particular subject to the purpose a future publication, becomes quite central to the ethos he presents in the *Travels*. For example, he uses it in a similar way to conclude his description of the emperor’s palace which, itself, is partly a parody of the epic tradition of “prosographia” or description of place. The rhetorical effect of indicating what one will *not* describe or say becomes influential in the *Travels*, though it often assumes a different form. We think especially of Gulliver’s reference to the emperor’s “many gracious expressions” for him in Chapter III “which to avoid the Censure of Vanity, I shall not repeat” (44). In each instance this particular posture enforces a sense of *copia* to which the author, limited by restrictions of time and space, is unable to do justice. Technically, this device is analogous to the figure of thought, “aposiopesis,” in which the speaker breaks off discourse, hinting that there is much more that could be said.¹⁹ The fact that Gulliver relies on it so frequently throughout the work is interesting since Swift in his “Letter of Thanks from My Lord W[harton] to the Lord Bishop of S. Aspagh, In the Name of the Kit-Cat-Club” singles out aposiopesis by name for ridicule.²⁰

The Gulliver who emerges from Book I is seen on one level to be waging a constant battle with a diminutive race who, in their mastery of forms of rhetorical decorum, are worthy opponents. On another level, though, he carefully continues to pursue his own “argument” with the reader—an opposition which does not really terminate until he banishes all men from his sight in Book IV. So preoccupied is Gulliver with using oratorical conventions to his advantage in Book I that he becomes temporarily blind to expedience and continues in his persuasive humility before a ruler who has condoned his destruction. Thus he becomes ridiculous when he comments on the torture the

¹⁹ Cicero designates aposiopesis as a figure of diction, but in either case it can be associated with inability to continue due to great emotion or the desire to hint that more that could be said. Cf. Peacham, 118.

²⁰ *Political Tracts: 1711-1713*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964) 155. See also The Jonathan Swift Archive online, page 13.

Lilliputians have in store for him:

I was so ill a Judge of Things, that I could not discover the Lenity and
Favour of this Sentence; but conceived it (perhaps erroneously) rather
to be rigorous than gentle (72).

We naturally think ahead to Gulliver's remarks in Book IV on the Houyhnhnms' having sentenced him to exile: "in my weak and corrupt Judgment, I thought it might consist with Reason to have been less rigorous" (280).

Despite Gulliver's failure in Lilliput, he is able to use the rhetorical posture of submission with success in Blefscu. There he uses self-abnegation to gain his freedom when, after "humbly" excusing himself, he tells the emperor that he is "resolved to venture myself in the Ocean rather than be an occasion of Difference between two such mighty Monarchs" (77). Thus, in one important sense, Gulliver does manage to emerge the rhetorical victor of Book I. In the remaining discussion, we shall suggest how the increasing alienation of the Gulliver-character from the societies he visits as well as from the reader, relates directly to his chosen orientation toward rhetorical forms and conventions.

The oratorical gestures of pathos and emphasis that Gulliver so skillfully employs to vie with the Lilliputians in Book I becomes even more prominent in the second voyage as an object of both humor and ridicule. When he first sees the Brobdingnagian giants, Gulliver does not hesitate an instant to assume the proper bearing and body movements for the Pathetic Tone of Amplification. It is clear also that Gulliver, who has resolved not to struggle, remains completely in control and can thus elect a demeanor appropriate for his circumstances. Nor is one misled by the negating posture with which he begins:

All I ventured was to raise mine Eyes towards the Sun, and place my Hands together
in a supplicating Posture, and to speak some words in an humble melancholy Tone,
suitable to the connection I was then in (87-8).

The obvious parallel to Lilliput, articulated in images of "Hands," "Eyes," and the "Sun," is further

extended when the giant registers his satisfaction with Gulliver's "Voice and Gestures." Here, however, Gulliver is not the observer but the observed. Back at the farmer's house, he enjoys yet another opportunity to display his virtuosity in the matter of voice and gestures and is so successful at it that the farmer later employs him solely for entertainment. Thus on market day, we find him before an audience at the inn:

I turned several Times to the Company, paid my Respects, said they were welcome; and used some other Speeches I had been taught. I took up a thimble filled with Liquor . . . and drank their Health. I drew out my Hanger and flourished it after the manner of Fencers in England (98).

Gulliver thus emerges in Brobdingnag as the heroic actor, but the emphasis here is more upon the formulaic quality of his behavior. His gesture with the "Hanger" particularly reinforces this point. In Lilliput it was the emperor who stood absurdly before the giant Gulliver with his hand on his sword, ready to defend himself, but in Book II the hanger proves on several important occasions to be a most crucial accessory for Gulliver. With it he can defend himself against rats, wasps and starlings, and, as Gulliver later confides to the King of Brobdingnag, after a most trying and not entirely successful encounter with a monkey,

if my Fear had suffered me to think so far ahead as to make Use of my Hanger (*looking fiercely and clapping my Hand upon the Hilt as I spoke*) when he poked his Paw into my Chamber, perhaps I should have given him such a Wound as would have made him glad to withdraw it with more Haste than he put it in²¹ (123-4).

Similar to Book I with its elaborate if formulaic descriptions of this kind, the Voyage to Brobdingnag affords ample opportunity for the mock-heroic. The point here, though, is Gulliver's association with an emblematic gesture of ferocity in reference to his hanger. Consequently his behavior, though it conforms emphatically to decorum, is mechanical.

²¹Italics mine.

Aside from his posture as a heroic actor with his looks and actions in Book II, Gulliver also displays his skills as a panegyrist. In reference to the Queen in Chapter 3, for example, Gulliver employs such epithets as “The Ornament of Nature,” “the Darling of the World,” “the Delight of her Subjects,” and “the Phoenix of Creation” (102). Here Swift uses the grammatical schemes of “Isocolon” and “Asyndeton”²² along with Antonomasia to parody vague, conventional encomiums. Gulliver repeats this practice somewhat later when, under more trying circumstances, he attempts to defend his country before the king. To the latter’s unflattering insinuations about the kind of nation England must be, based on details that Gulliver has already shared, Gulliver insists, somewhat hurt, that his noble country is

the Mistress of Art and Arms, the Scourge of France, the Arbitress of *Europe*,
the Seat of Virtue, Piety, and Truth, the Pride and Envy of the World (107).

In later discussions with the King, however, Gulliver, without realizing it, mocks the sense of *copia* characterizing his previous panegyric with its catalogue of virtues when he paraphrases the king’s view of recent affairs in the West as a “Heap of Conspiracies, Rebellions, Murders, Massacres, Revolutions, Banishments” (132). Swift likewise succeeds in satirizing the Ramist feature of list making by itself, a tendency that becomes even more pronounced in Book IV.²³

With regard to the Gulliver-Author’s own prose in Book II, we note that many of the same figures of thought from the previous book, reappear. Gulliver frequently mentions in this part of the *Travels* that he withhold s further details, either out of humility or for the sake of brevity. On the Other hand, Gulliver relies more often here on the figure of “Aporia”²⁴ which is particularly appropriate in a world of superlatives: it enables him to express doubt concerning his worthiness or ability to do descriptive justice to a given subject or cause. The effect is both to heighten the impact of a particular

²² “Isocolon” is parallel grammatical or “periods similar in length. Cf. Morris Croll, “Attic Prose in the Seventeenth Century,” *Essential Articles: English Augustan Backgrounds*, ed. Bernard Schilling (Hamden: Archon Books, 1961) 44n; “asyndeton” the deliberate omission of conjunctions for effect. Cf. Herbert Rix, “Rhetoric in Spenser’s Poetry,” *Pennsylvania State College Studies*, No. 7 (State College, Pa. 1940), 31-32.

²³ Harold Fisch, “The Puritans and the Reform of Prose Style,” *ELH* 19 (December, 1952), 229-48.

²⁴ “Aporia,” sometimes referred to as “Dubitatio” Cf. Herbert Rix, 40.

phenomenon as well as to confirm the author's own scrupulosity. By the end of Book II, though, Gulliver's heroic self-awareness has been considerably strained—with unsuccessful speeches as well as combats with Rats, Dwarfs, and Monkeys. Like the Gulliver of Book I, he must rely on his own particular artifice in the form of facial expressions and gestures to expedite his escape. We find him dissembling a sorrowful disposition when, after commanding the page to set him down on the shore, he casts “many a wistful melancholy Look towards the Sea” (140). At this point, Fortune intervenes in the form of a bird, and Gulliver is able to rejoin his fellow countrymen at sea.

We can say, then, that Gulliver's successes in Brobdingnag are not unrelated to his application of appropriate gestures and speeches at critical moments. And he remains the self-conscious orator throughout. He does, however, experience somewhat of a reversal at the very end of Book II when his speeches fail to convince the English sea captain who rescues him, about his previous adventures. When the captain finally acquiesces to his story and jokingly compares the huge bird dropping Gulliver's box to “*Phaeton*,” our stylistically conscious author, confesses that he “did not much admire the Conceit” (147-8).

The unique character of Book III, with its pre-eminently topical satire, might seem to call for a different approach to the theme and function of rhetoric. We tend to focus on the allegorical devices such as the Word Engine at the Academy of Lagado that re-assimilates all of human knowledge when fed with chopped up sentences, phrases, and all variety of words. With this invention, of course, Swift brilliantly satirizes Augustan self-consciousness toward style as well as, more particularly, those members of the Royal Society who, like Thomas Sprat, sought by strictly controlling diction to approximate more nearly the objects itself of thought. Likewise, the ideal of simplicity of language is ridiculed in the description of those who carry around objects in place of words to achieve the very limit of concreteness.²⁵

Despite the contention of many critics, including Starkman and Quintana, that Book III has

²⁵ A. C. Howell, “*Res et Verba: Words and Things*,” *Essential Articles for English Augustan Backgrounds*, ed. Bernard Schilling (Hamden: Archon Books, 1961).

little “organic” relation to the rest of the Travels,²⁶ Swift can be seen to articulate some important points through the sub-theme of Gulliver’s rhetorical success. We have seen how in Book I, the giant Gulliver is made to compete with the Lilliputian orators. In Book II his rhetorical and dramatic skill renders Gulliver a marvel, though not without sarcastic overtones. Gulliver is equally prepared to employ his battery of rhetorical weapons in Book III where he encounters problems of a different kind.

The scene opens, then, as Gulliver endeavors in his usual way to attract the attention of whatever manner of inhabitants Fortune has singled out for him to deal with:

I waved my Cap . . . and my Handkerchief towards the Island; and upon its nearer Approach, I called and shouted with the utmost Strength of my Voice; and then, looking Circumspectly, I beheld a Crowd gathered to that Side which was most in my View (157).

Gulliver’s behavior is reminiscent of what in Raymond Smith’s words constitutes “bravado”²⁷ in the dinner table scene in Book II. There Gulliver, having tripped over a bread crust, related how he

took my Hat (which I held under my Arm out of good Manners) and waving it over my Head, made three Huzza’s to show I had got no Mischief by the Fall (90).

Here, in Laputa though, Gulliver can receive no confirmation by the response of this bizarre gathering:

“I found by their pointing towards me and to each other, that they plainly discovered me, although they made no Return to my Shouting” (157). His position becomes increasingly uncomfortable as he resorts to more emphatic behavior:

I then put myself in the most supplicating Postures, and spoke in the humblest Accent, but received no Answer (157).

After having gained the island itself and remained there for some interval, Gulliver indicates that, on all fronts, his efforts simply to communicate have been notoriously unsuccessful. Not only has it taken him a whole month to learn the language, but his powers as an orator have been so

²⁶ Starkman, 196; Ricntardo Quintana, *The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift* (Gloucester, Mass. Peter Smith, 1967), 315-19.

²⁷ Raymond J. Smith, JR., “The ‘Character’ of Lemeul Gulliver,” *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 10 (1965), 133-40.

ineffective that only through the intercessions of “a great Lord at Court” (173) can he hope to leave Laputa. Gulliver’s dilemma in Book III is that, for the first time in the voyages, he is ignored. Only when he encounter Lord Munodi in Chapter Four does he regain his bearings: Munodi represents the only being in this kingdom whose sense of rhetorical decorum has not entirely been lost. Yet by his hesitancy, even Lord Munodi makes Gulliver look ridiculous. Traveling together toward Munodi’s home, the author relates how he “gave due Praises to every Thing I saw” but that, until after dinner, “his Excellency took not the least Notice” (176).

In Book III, then, Gulliver’s rhetorical stratagems tend to go off target with the inhabitants and are sometimes ignored altogether. Left in this frustrating position, Gulliver assumes a posture of circumspection which he develops at some length. At Glubbdubdrib where he enjoys a chance to exercise his skill in physiognomy, even his fears become formulaic: “I related a short History of my several Adventures, yet not without some *Hesitation, and frequently looking behind me* to the Place where I had seen those domestick Spectres” (194).²⁸ Here his very uneasiness takes the form of a mechanical histrionic gesture. A passage from Buckingham’s speech in *Richard III* comes to mind:

. . . I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,
 Speak and look back, and pry on every side . . .
 Intending deep suspicion. (3.5.5-8).²⁹

Nowhere in Book III do Gulliver’s strategies show him to be more absurd than in the Struldbrugs incident. His deception concerning the nature of the Struldbrugs as well as his mistaken sense of values with regard to the implicit moral issue, is successfully objectified in his naïve use of “exclamatio” here; he cried out, he explains, “as in a Rapture” and then proceeds with lavish use of “paromoion” and “anaphora”:³⁰

²⁸ Italics mine.

²⁹ *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, & Co. 1961).

³⁰ *Paromoion* pertains to periods of equal length and ordonnance (Cf. Croll, 45n). *Anaphora* is repetition of words at beginnings of phrases or clauses (Peacham, 41).

Happy Nation, where every Child hath at least a Chance for being immortal!

Happy People who enjoy so many living Examples of antient Virtue . . .

But happiest beyond all Comparison are those excellent Struldbruggs (208).

Significantly, the “Gentleman” to whom Gulliver addresses his “Discourse” regards him “with a Sort of Smile, which usually ariseth from Pity to the Ignorant” yet still lets him proceed in his obvious Delusion. Thus Gulliver becomes even more preposterous when he confides to his readers that “it was easy to be so eloquent on so copious and delightful a Subject” (209).

Gulliver does manage to return from this third voyage, however, and by submitting a petition of humble entreaty to the Japanese emperor, he is able, though just barely, to circumvent “trampling upon the Crucifix” (216). The strain endured by Gulliver, both rhetorically and otherwise from this experience, is undeniable. The barrier of indifference he so repeatedly encounters in this book has exposed him to a new level of alienation which is only surpassed in the voyage to the Houyhnhnms.

The usual oratorical confrontation that Swift has lead us to expect at the beginning of each voyage is presented with supreme irony in Houyhnhnmland. When Gulliver tries to make inferences about the character of the first Yahoo based on the latter’s countenance—much as he had earlier done with the Lilliputian orators—he becomes quite disoriented. The Yahoo, he relates, “distorted several ways every feature of his Visage” (224). Nor is Gulliver at all reassured by the gestures of this strange creature. When the latter “lifted up his fore Paw,” the author, in doubt as to whether the motive was “Curiosity” or “Mischief,” rebuffs him with his hanger. At this point the situation is resolved, and the countenance and gestures lose their ambiguity; after “howling and making odious Faces,” the Yahoos, now a corporate assembly, proceed to climb trees and befoul the listener—our patient author.

Immediately, though, another encounter takes place, this time between Gulliver and a Houyhnhmn. The author is much less hasty in judging the countenance of this animal since he mentions

that “We stood gazing at each other for some time” (224). Thus far all seems well enough, but when Gulliver finally offers an appropriate gesture of his own, the result is dismaying:

I took the Boldness, to reach my Hand towards his Neck, with a Design to stroak
it; using the common Style and Whistle of Jockies when they are going to handle a strange
Horse. (224)

The Houyhnhnm, though, can only receive such “Civilities” with “Disdain” and, accordingly, “shook his Head, and bent his Brows, softly lifting his left Fore-Foot to remove my Hand” (224). Subsequently, the Houyhnhnm is joined by a companion, however, and Gulliver emphasizes the “very formal Manner” of their salutation (225). Likewise, as the horses confer together, the author notes behavior on their part that is analogous to his own demeanor back in Glubbudbrib: he compares them to “Persons deliberating on some Affair of Weight; but *often turning their Eyes toward me*, as if it were to watch that I might not escape”(225).³¹ Despite their suspicious attitude at this point, the horses soon convince Gulliver by their “Actions and Behaviour” (226) that they are “endued” with “Reason” and that, indeed, their “various Gestures” were “not unlike those of a Philosopher”(226). The point here is that Swift juxtaposes the image of common work animals and the traditional elements of Oratorical Delivery to satirize the self-conscious posturing that Gulliver has depended on throughout the *Travels*. Nor is Gulliver flexible enough to drop such forms in the most unconventional situations. He even goes so far in Chapter III to suggest that a Houyhnhnm’s putting “his Forehoof to his Mouth” is “a Motion that appeared perfectly natural” (230). These incidents all function to prepare the reader for Gulliver’s final extremity of imitating the “Gait and Gesture”(279) of the horses in Chapter X.

As we might expect, the Gulliver-author is as much on the defensive in Book IV as he has ever been. He frequently resorts to those devices of argumentation that secure his credibility in the eyes of

³¹Italics mine.

the audience and which help to ameliorate the distasteful overtones of a controversial subject. By using “Parrhesia” again, for example, Gulliver is able to anticipate the reader’s objections to a passage and to “crave pardon beforehand” as Peacham explains.³² Thus, prior to his relation of the baby-yahoo’s befouling him, he mentions that “perhaps I might have had the Reader’s Pardon if it were wholly omitted”(266). Here the irony is that he does not omit the incident but that by ingratiating himself in this way, he obtains what is, in effect, the reader’s consent. During his uneasy discourses with the Houyhnhnm master, the Gulliver-character also makes use of this figure. Before entering on a relation of the humiliating role that horses must bear in European culture, Gulliver insists that the Houyhnhnm “give me his Word of Honour that he would not be offended” (278). As in previous books, Gulliver often uses “diceologia” to offer reasons for the existing state of things. In Chapter VII he relies on a very elaborate version of this figure to justify his unfavorable depiction of his fellow countrymen. He begins by anticipating the reader’s hostility:

The Reader may be disposed to wonder how I could prevail upon myself to give so free a Representation of my own Species . . . But I must freely confess, that the many virtues of those excellent *Quadrupeds* placed in opposite View to human Corruptions, had so far opened mine Eyes and enlarged my Understanding, that I began to view the Actions and Passions of Man in a very different Light; and to think the Honour of my own Kind not worth managing (258).

The passage is one of the most pivotal and controversial in the work, and it is significant that Gulliver relies on devices such as Antonomasia (“those excellent *Quadrupeds*”) and Antiphrasis or one-word irony (“so *free* a Representation”)³³ to achieve deliberate vagueness.³⁴

³² Peacham, 113.

³³ Italics mine.

³⁴ *Antiphrasis* is described simply as irony of one word. Cf. Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare’s Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1966), 325.

Gulliver in this book also relies heavily on Aporia or self doubting to enable elevation of his subject matter, much as he had in Book II. In Chapter V of Book IV, for example, he indicates his concern that he will not “be able to do Justice to my Master’s Arguments and Expressions, which must needs suffer by my want of capacity as well as by a Translation into our barbarous English” (245). Gulliver has also led up to his claim by showing an increased preference for the noble paucity of the Houyhnhnm language. He mentions earlier that “their Language expressed the Passions very well” (226) and later goes on to explain the obstacles in discussing such concepts as lying, doubting, and opinion since there is no objectification for such phenomena in Houyhnhnmland. By the time Gulliver’s own preference for the simple, unambiguous language of the horses is established in Chapter V, however, an ironic development occurs. In sympathy with the Houyhnhnm’s criterion, he insists in Chapter XII that, throughout the work he has chosen “to relate plain Matter of Fact in the Simplest Manner and Style” (291). Yet when we return to Chapter 5 to the passage where he describes his answers to the Houyhnhnm master about European government, we find the simple, unpretentious author employing the most Ciceronian of styles. This passage is worth including for some length. He begins by stating that he shall limit his discussion to “a few of the chief . . . Causes and Motives” for war, and then proceeds:

Difference in Opinions has cost many Millions of Lives; For Instance, whether *Flesh* be *Bread*, or *Bread* be *Flesh*: whether the Juice of a certain Berry be *Blood* or *Wine*:

Whether *Whistling* be a Vice or Virtue: whether it be better *to kiss a Post*, or throw it in the Fire; What is the best Colour for a *Coat*, whether *Black*, *White*, *Red* or *Grey*; and whether it should be *long* or *short*, *narrow* or *wide*, *dirty* or *clean*; with many more.

Neither are any Wars so furious and bloody, or of so long Continuance, as those occasioned by Difference in Opinion, especially in things indifferent (245-6).

Although the Gulliver-author and, or, the Gulliver-character here, retains a characteristic simplicity

of diction,³⁵ the structure is basically that of Euphuistic prose. We could make much of citing the many Gorgian schemes of repetition employed: Isocolon (periods of equal length and structure), Antimetabole or repetition with inversion (*Flesh . . . Bread; Bread . . . Flesh*) and Asyndeton or lack of conjunctions.³⁶ The elaborate ordonnance of such prose would be an unlikely vehicle to assist the unsophisticated Houyhnhmn listener who can barely imagine such concepts as “Opinion” and “Difference.” Nor is such prose characteristic of Swift except when his purpose is parodic. In its own way this passage is analogous to the long lists and catalogues Swift uses elsewhere in Book IV as well as in Book II as a mockery of stylistic *copia*.³⁷ In any case, we can conclude that, as a rhetorician devoted to the ideal of unornamented, Houyhnhmn-like simplicity, Gulliver here is hypocritical.

It is certainly possible to explain Gulliver’s experience in Book IV generally in terms of rhetorical hypocrisy. We note, for example, that even when his fate of banishment from Houyhnhnmland is sealed, he attempts to move the Houyhnhnms, those exemplars of honesty and simplicity, by means of contrivance. After using privative terms of submission, he falls into a swoon, and we note with a sense of pathetic irony, that once again, Gulliver’s artifice has misfired: the Houyhnhnm thought he was dead. And, even in these last pages, the reader is also subjected to Gulliver’s hypocrisy in rhetoric. After maintaining a tone of misanthropy and deep pessimism consistent with his disappointment and subsequent alienation, the author suddenly “shifts gears” in Chapter XII. With a tone approaching polite gaiety, he explains to the “gentle Reader”(291) that he has had our own good at heart in seeking to “inform and not amuse thee.” How we are to reconcile this tone with the Gulliver who, several pages later orders all fellow Yahoos from his sight, is difficult to say. We feel with C. J. Rawson, that we hardly know what to make of it all.³⁸

³⁵ John F. Ross, *Swift and Defoe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 102.

³⁶ Antimetabole is a scheme of construction that involves repeating words in reverse grammatical order. Cf. Miriam Joseph, 305.

³⁷ Cf. Louis T. Milic, *A Quantitative Approach to the Style of Jonathan Swift* (The Hague, Moulton & Co., 1967), 87. Although deferring to some of this author’s observations, my thesis in this paragraph is a refutation of his point.

³⁸ Rawson, 81.

* * *

When we consider *Gulliver's Travels* as a whole, we can see that the changing relation of the Gulliver-persona to the people he visits, on one hand, and to the reader, on the other, is intricately involved with the sub-theme of successful rhetoric. Gulliver first goes to a land where he shows himself the oratorical equal of the inhabitants, certainly an ironic situation in terms of the physical disparity. In Brobdingnag his very success in the realm of rhetoric becomes a means for diminishing him in a moral sense as he hold forth with his skill on the questionable achievements and characteristics of his native country, much to the bewilderment of the king. When he comes to Laputa in Book III, Gulliver's rhetorical skill only accentuates his remoteness from the inhabitants who, in their bizarre preoccupations, are beyond the possibility of communication, and that most especially with regard to forms and decorums. Finally, the Gulliver of Book IV is made to face a moral predicament in which he must relinquish the rhetorical mask or be alienated completely: by this time he is too inflexible to change and must be rejected as hypocritical. The reader leaves Gulliver, then, not so much as a misanthrope perhaps as a comic figure, ossified in his commitment to forms of behavior and who yet maintains, like his forbear, Polonius, "Madam, I swear, I use no art at all."³⁹

³⁹ *Hamlet* 2.2.96, ed. Hardin Craig, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glenview, Ill. Scott, Foresman and Co., 1961), 914.

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